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Dr. Cowden Convocation Day Speech.
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This ceremony marks the beginning of the seventeenth year of the University of Dallas. (It is actually the sixty-eighth year of the original charter to which this University fell heir--there was a University of Dallas which was founded by the Vincentian Fathers in 1905.) But in the scale of time prevailing in these halls, an added half century carries relatively little weight. We who count the Greeks, Hebrews, and Romans our forebears tend to think in terms of thousands of years--of "epochs" and ages--to count Dante and Aquinas "recent," and to call everything after the sixteenth century "modern." Therefore, since we cannot be ancient, we prefer the more youthful count of years and hence reckon time from our incarnation upon this campus, celebrating seventeen years of unfolding here, in an unlikely place, of a center of learning.

This gathering today culminates the opening exercises of the school year. A week of celebration and busyness is behind us. Classes have started. With gas mains barely covered up, with furniture not yet delivered, with more confusion than usual--ready or not--the year has begun.

Ceremonies are odd occasions in the world today. When shopping centers are always near at hand, every day is a festival. Football and other sports make each weekend a carnival. The grim realities of life are not so pressing as in early ^{er} days, when they had to be thrust aside defiantly for a brief period of gaiety. The need for event is sadly diminished in our time. And yet, though we do not need special events as moments of rest in the midst of drudgery--or even as moments of foolishness in the midst of restraint--ceremony does remain important. It gives form to our lives, which would otherwise exist in a ceaseless flux of experience. Ceremony gives form. Through it we may contemplate our lives for a moment and examine our purposes together.

in our time
I suspect we ^{in our time} approach ceremony wryly, a little shamefaced at our own pretence of panoply. Somewhere along the way the art of pomposity has been lost. We wince before the accusation of following empty forms; and out of fear of ridicule, allow the pieties to suffer neglect.

And yet I think that time of derision is passing. The pieties are in again. What they express ~~is a desire~~

is a desire for a wholeness in life within a body of people--a people who have a history and a sacred past. Perhaps a ^{key}~~clue~~ to this new direction lies in a study made a dozen years ago by Paul Tillich in his Theology of Culture.

Tillich classifies education into ~~the~~ technical, humanistic, and inducting. The technical we have with us always, throughout most of history playing a subordinate role, but at times as in the 19th century, becoming dominant. Humanistic education embodies most of the accepted ideals of education since the Renaissance--intelligent people are likely to subscribe to it ^{accidentally} if they do not think deeply about the matter; it began in a ^{elitist, aristocratic,} religious context and moved to the secular, still beautiful and noble of sentiment, but actually by now an empty husk. Humanistic education has burnt itself out in Tillich's view, and perhaps he was implicitly predicting the revolt against education of the past decade. Inducting education ^{he describes as} is the introduction of the young into the institutions of society, into the traditions, moral standards, and pieties; it prevailed in tribal times and on through the Middle Ages. "One can say," he pointed out, "that induction is initiation into the mystery of human existence."

Tillich, in his antiestablishment views of 1959, held that all three kinds of education were debased at that time and subservient to a nationalistic industrialized state and that "initiation into the mystery of human existence" was quite remote from the purposes of most schools. I suspect that condition still prevails, and yet within the people who populate the schools is the desire for initiation into the mysteries. The pieties are operative again, and the suppliant search for their gods.

Humanistic education is essentially Promethean in its thrust, seeking its own perfection. The figure of Prometheus has had a sturdy appeal for modern man; he it was who gave man fire and all useful arts;

"...listen to the sad story of mankind, who like children lived until I gave them understanding and a portion of reason; yet not in disparagement of men I speak, but meaning to set forth the greatness of my charity. For seeing they saw not, and hearing they understood not, but like as shapes in a dream they wrought all the days of their life in confusion. No houses of brick raised in the warmth of the sun they had, nor

[he says in Prometheus Bound]

fabrics of wood, but like the little ants they dwelt underground in the sunless depth of caverns. No certain sign of approaching winter they knew, no harbinger of flowering spring or fruitful summer; ever they labored at random, till I taught them to discern the seasons by the rising and the obscure setting of the stars.

Numbers I invented for them, the chiefest of all discoveries; I taught them the grouping of letters, to be a memorial and record of the past, the mistress of the arts and mother of the Muses."

^{in punishment}
and yet he lies chained to a mountain, his liver plucked out nightly by ^{an eagle} ~~a vulture~~. His fault lay in his failures to give proper respect to Zeus, in a lack of piety, I might put it. ~~And yet~~ Piety would be most difficult for Prometheus, because he was one of the older gods, one of the Titans, who could not, in all conscience, pay deference to his nephew. When we identify humanistic learning with Prometheus, as I think is accurate, we are saying it is impious learning, not in the proper descent. Of course, in all truth, it is not the learning--not fire, not computers--that is impious; it is the attitude. It is the desire for self sufficiency.

It is what I think Northrop Frye in a recent book calls "the myth of freedom"-(I speak from hearsay around my house)-as opposed to "the myth of concern." Frye writes-(and she pointed this out to me)-"The myth of concern exists to hold society together." Neither one of us would admit that the reason for the myth is the binding of society, but we did agree that it has that effect. It does hold people together in a community because they find in the myth a shared artifact of piety. The mystery of human existence finds some satisfaction in the myth of concern.

If I were seeking to tell such a myth my inclination would be to choose some story with a mighty moral, some story that would instruct us quite apparently. But myths do not exist for that purpose. They seem to exist for themselves. I was much struck with this fact in reading the recent novel The Glory of Hera by Caroline Gordon, our visiting writer of last year. She tells the story of Hercules quite straightforwardly. There is no great uplifting of the soul from the reading of it, no chastisement of the spirit. And yet its form haunts the memory.

As an infant he strangled two brazen serpents in

his crib. It was he who spewed the milky way into the heavens.

When Heracles ceased to be a child, Amphytrion taught him how to drive a chariot and how to turn corners without grazing the goal. Castor taught him fencing and the rudiments of warfare and his immortal twin Pollux [These are the Dioscúri, the Gemini, who later became such favorites of the Romans.]--I twist the tale a bit--taught him boxing. Eumólpus taught him to play the lyre, and Linus, son of the river-god Ismenius, taught him literature. There came a day when the gentle Eumolpus could not appear to instruct Heracles on the lyre, and Linus, the literature teacher, took his place. His instruction was so didactic and his correction so severe that Heracles, infuriated, struck him with the lyre and, alas, killed him. I shall not dwell on the implications of this story for the academic profession except to say that Heracles is not a student to be emulated. But for a hero one might do worse. He was a man of violent temper, subject to madness; but always he was contrite when he had done wrong. He was a man of immense piety, seeking always to do the will of the gods and granting them their glory when a

prodigious deed was done, building altars and sacrificing oxen. He was the son of Zeus, conceived on a night when the stars stood still, the high god coming to the virtuous Alcmena in the ^{only} form of her husband ^{she would accept, that} Amphitryon. Hercules was the last child engendered by Zeus, a god grown responsible and worried about mankind. He would give men a hero, greater than Perseus, a slayer of monsters, capable of mighty labors, subject to suffering and to an agonizing death, to be born again in heaven.

What does the Hercules story mean to us who are concerned with education? It speaks powerfully of personal fallibility; of the vanquishing of the powers of darkness. I think it says to us that when one thinks of education ^{merely} in terms of the perfection of individual persons, one is mistaking an accidental aspect of the process ^{for its} ~~of an~~ essential ~~part~~. There is a work to be done by the human intellect and imagination: we can all be part of that work. We cannot all be constantly perfect, unbiased, judicious, fair-minded, wise, and acute. We shall sin frequently against truth and honor, against faith and charity. But once we have been converted (and the Greeks used this word for the turning that happens to the soul in

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true education), we cannot lose the imprint of that profound event. And for Miss Gordon, as I think it should be for us, the story of Heracles is a Christian story. She does not alter the tales she has gathered and is faithful to the myth. It is still Greek, still pagan, and yet the very telling of it makes it Christian.

Perhaps this procedure should provide a clue to Christian educators: if we are true to the materials we encounter, in the modern as well as the ancient world, they shall somehow be transfigured into significance for the coming of the Kingdom.

+ + +

Let me say a few words--unmythically--about our University. Learning as we perceive it is a perennial activity of man, not subject to fads, not governed by style. In the midst of a veritable colony of miscellaneous colleges and universities, both private and public, this university, small and intense, still young, has been certain that by pursuing its own sort of education, it could provide a temple for Minerva, a home for true learning--in which each person comes upon knowledge anew and claims it as his own.

When learning occurs in this fashion the role of the student becomes that of participant rather than subject. So, too, the professor's role is that of participant rather than instructor. Learning is a joint venture. Much of the pathway, of course, is familiar to the professor, but for him, too, there is newness and discovery and delight.

This shared delight characterizes a center of learning as opposed to a school of instruction. And it is as a center of learning that together we do our work: The uncovering, over and over again, of something always fresh, the inducting of younger scholars into their heritage, the discovery of new operations of grace in our various disciplines: the vanquishing of monsters, the movement onward toward the light.

In this ceremony today, then, we come together in this room not simply as individuals, but as a college--a learned faculty garbed in outmoded splendor arrayed before a gathering of students; an intelligent and receptive student body spread out before a gaggle of professors--all joined together symbolically in unity,

poised once more for the search for wisdom. Surely
this year we shall find her; surely this time we shall
bring out the best in each other and call down wisdom
to dwell among us!